INSTITUTE OF VETERINARY SCIENCE

Leahurst Campus including:

Hospitals & Large Animal Practices; Ness Heath & Wood Park Farms
Diagnostic & Research Facilities

Liverpool Campus including:

University Veterinary Practice; Veterinary Teaching Suite; Thompson
Yates Facilities

Working with Animals

Guidance and Risk Assessments

REVISED July 2018
Introduction

Staff, students and visitors to some areas of the Institute of Veterinary Science, in particular the Leahurst Campus, may be exposed to animals. In the Leahurst Small Animal Teaching Hospital (SATH) and Liverpool University Small Animal Practice, exposure is predominantly to dogs and cats, but there may also be intermittent exposure to small numbers of rabbits, rodents, birds and reptiles. Horses and other equids will be seen at both the Philip Leverhulme Equine Hospital (PLEH) at Leahurst and at external premises by the first opinion equine practice. A variety of farm species including cattle, sheep, goats and pigs, along with occasional poultry and camels, may be encountered at the farms and PLEH, within the Farm Animal Practice and on external farms; also at premises such as abattoirs. Other food animals, including fish and bees, are encountered through public health teaching. Many of the research programmes based in the school and at Leahurst involve poultry (defined as chickens, turkeys, pheasants and partridges), wild birds and wild mammals along with a range of rodent species. All of the above species may also be encountered in post-mortem and dissection rooms at Leahurst and in the Veterinary Teaching Suite (VTS), in addition to a range of zoo-kept species. In short, it is difficult to overestimate the range of animal species that might be encountered within various areas of the Veterinary Institute and Leahurst and associated external premises.

Potential hazards from working with animals include allergies, physical injuries and zoonotic infections. Any person working or coming into contact with animals in the Institute of Veterinary Science or on the Leahurst Campus must read and observe the relevant guidance. Visitors (e.g. staff from Facilities Management, Computer Services, outside contractors etc.) will be made aware of any risk and given appropriate guidelines.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the University of Liverpool Code of Practice for Working with Animals (currently under revision).
Further guidance on animal allergens this is covered by The University of Liverpool Code of Practice on Controlling Exposure to Occupational Animal Allergens.
Guidance on biosecurity issues can be found at the Biosecurity website.

Further information is available on the Institute of Veterinary Science intranet page: https://www.liv.ac.uk/intranet/veterinary-science/ and the HSE website: http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/index.htm
Allergies to animals

Evidence published by the HSE and in the peer review literature confirms that working with any animals, including vertebrates and invertebrates, can cause allergy.

Individuals exposed to laboratory research animals during the course of their work may develop a condition known as Laboratory Animal Allergy (LAA). This is a hypersensitivity or allergic reaction which may develop as a response to repeated exposure to allergens. The common animal allergens are proteins from body tissue, excretions and secretions from mammals, and birds. Similarly, staff working with insects are at risk of developing allergic reactions to the insect frass and scales or hair particles. Insects with a scaly or hairy cuticle are a greater risk than insects with a soft cuticle.

Exposure to animal fur, dander or body fluids may lead to allergic dermatitis, rhinitis, conjunctivitis and/or asthma. Symptoms include blocked, itchy or running nose, itchy or watery eyes, skin rash, tight or wheezy chest and/or shortness of breath. Some allergic individuals may, on exposure, develop asthma, which is potentially life-threatening.

It is not possible to predict who will develop an allergic response although it is recognised that the risk of becoming sensitised to animal and insect proteins - the first stage in the development of allergy - is related to exposure: the greater the degree of exposure, the higher the likelihood of sensitivity developing.

It is the responsibility of those with known allergies to animals to disclose them on entry to the veterinary course or employment. Where allergies are severe and potentially life threatening advice from Occupational Health must be obtained. Health surveillance should be provided for all employees who are likely to be exposed to occupational allergens including animal allergens. Individuals must be notified to Occupational Health to register and initiate the process by their line manager.

In practice the risk of exposure to occupational animal allergens will vary considerably depending on the type of animals present, the working environment and conditions, the work activity carried out and many other factors. A suitable and sufficient COSHH assessment must be carried out to identify risk levels and proportionate control measures.

The risk assessment contained in this document covers routine clinical work.

A COSHH assessment form for animal allergens is available on the Safety Adviser’s website. This should be used for areas that work with animals in more enclosed environments e.g. MBE and Block B.

When working with animals that are housed out-of-doors including, for example, those in open-sided barns, the risk of staff developing allergy is likely to be no greater than the general population so precautions such as ventilation or wearing RPE are not normally required, although they may be required where animals are kept in more enclosed conditions.

Areas of campus will be maintained as allergen free, these include the Main building, Leahuurst House, Ritchie House, Oxenhale, Jordan, and Wellcome, buildings. If members of staff / students are working with animals they are requested to change their protective clothing BEFORE entering these buildings.

Further information on animal allergies can be found in the Code of Practice on Controlling Exposure to Occupational Animal Allergens.
Physical injuries

The unpredictable nature of animals means that any examination or procedure may be hazardous and injuries resulting from working with animals make up a significant proportion of the Institutes’ reported accidents. These may include kicks, crushes and tread injuries from horses, farm and other large animals which can be extremely serious because of the size and weight of these animals, and bites and scratches from dogs, cats and other animals, that can cause both traumatic injury and infection.

While it is acknowledged that the absolute prevention of injuries from animals is impossible, this guidance aims to reduce the number of injuries from working with animals and their potential consequences by ensuring that all Institute members and visitors at risk from injury are protected from unnecessary exposure, have received necessary training, understand how animals react when under stress and are aware of the correct procedures to reduce the risk of injuries from kicks, crushes, tread injuries, bites and scratches.

Guidance and Control Measures

All work where there are significant hazards and risks present requires a risk assessment to be carried out prior to work commencing. From these assessments of activities undertaken on a daily/regular basis local rules/local codes of practice must be prepared to address local conditions and identify the correct ways of working and dealing with the hazards and risks.

Heads of Department must ensure that standard operating procedures and/or local rules that detail the potential hazards and controls necessary to reduce the risk associated with animal handling and common clinical procedures carried out in the clinical facilities within in their department are developed. These procedures should be discussed and communicated with those who work with animals.

If anyone has the least doubt about their ability to handle an animal, it is important to seek assistance from appropriately trained staff first.
All new staff/student must be fully trained in the correct handling of animals.
Appropriate hoists and handling equipment must be maintained to a high standard and used at all times to prevent manual handling injuries. The temperament of an animal should always be discussed with its owner before beginning treatment.
Always be aware sickness may alter the temperament of the gentlest animal; never be complacent and assume an animal will bite, kick, scratch, attack if the opportunity arises. Members of staff trained in first are available to help with any injuries and first aid boxes are located across the site.

Clinical

In a clinical setting, an early assessment should be made of a patient and the procedure to which it will be subjected, to determine the precautionary measures that will be required during handling or treatment. It is important that the person handling the animal has an understanding of the animal's possible behaviours under the conditions to which it is being handled.

The likelihood of an untoward event may increase with fearful or aggressive animals, and the level of discomfort or pain likely to result from the planned activity or clinical intervention.

An assessment should be made of the patient and if possible the owner asked about the patient’s temperament. Any observations made should be entered into the patient’s notes.

The clinician or senior nurse responsible for the patient’s care is responsible for determining the control measures necessary, and these should include ensuring the availability of adequate time for the animal to acclimatise to its environment and the procedure to be planned and carried out calmly, appropriate restraint (physical or chemical) to be provided, suitable personal protective equipment deployed relevant to the nature of the risk, the availability of assistance and the level of training of those handling the animal, ensuring that each is appropriate to manage the perceived level of risk.

A second opinion may be sought from a more senior staff member if necessary.
Students treating horses in loose-boxes should always work in pairs. Please refer to the local rules and safe operating procedures for each department. BEVA guidance on Managing Risks From Working with Horses provides additional guidance on risk assessments and control measures relating.

These considerations can be remembered by reviewing the elements reflected in the acronym “TREAT” before engaging in any clinical activity:
- Time & Task
- Restraint
- Equipment
- Assistance
- Training.

Farm Animal Handling

All large animals can be unpredictable (cattle, sheep or pigs). They should be handled quietly and with appropriate handling facilities.

Some work with cattle will need two people. Always assess the need for help before beginning the task. Attempting to carry out stock tasks on unrestrained cattle or with makeshift equipment is particularly hazardous. Never underestimate the risk from cattle, even with good precautions in place.

To reduce the risk of injury when handling cattle you should have:
- proper handling facilities, which are well maintained and in good working order;
- a race and a crush suitable for the animals to be handled;
- trained and competent workers;
- a rigorous culling policy for temperamental animals.

Further information on safe cattle handling equipment can be found in HSE Guidance and in HSE Information Sheet 35.

Bulls

Accidents, some of them fatal, happen every year because bulls are not treated with respect. Remember, a bull can kill you when he is being playful just as easily as when he is angry. Make sure you can handle a bull safely:
- Train bulls to associate people with feeding, grooming or exercise.
- Ring bulls at 10 months old, and inspect the ring regularly.
- Find out how bulls new to the farm have been handled, the equipment they are used to, and take time to get to know them.
- Check handlers are competent (with training and supervision), fit, knowledgeable about safety equipment to and aware of the dangers.
- Use handling aids such as bull poles and halters.
- Avoid running stock bulls through the milking parlour.
- Provide a purpose-built pen for dairy bulls.

No one should ever enter the enclosure when the bull is loose.

Pigs

Make full use of pig boards when moving or working among animals. Ensure the sow is properly restrained or segregated when working with piglets.
Research

Any work involving the deliberate infection of an animal with a biological agent (infectious micro-organism) must be carried out in an appropriate animal room; the hazard group of the agent dictates the animal room containment level that must be used (and so the control measures that must be in place). Work with genetically modified (transgenic) animals requires a specific assessment under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 2014. Forms are available on the H&S website. The assessment must be considered by the local Genetic Modification Safety Committee before work starts.

Zoonotic diseases

Many animals will show no disease associated with their zoonotic infection, control is often best based on thinking about sources of infection (via aerosol, mouth, skins and eyes, bites etc) rather than individual pathogens, and be based on ensuring basic hygiene procedures are in place. Most laboratory animals are purpose bred, healthy and of known microbiological status. However, the likelihood of persistent or latent infection with a zoonotic agent should be considered.

Specific risk assessments for dealing with particular activities, species and/or conditions e.g. wildlife, post mortem examination, and laboratory work should be undertaken.

Staff and students who are immune-suppressed or taking immune-suppressants should be aware that they will be exposed to organisms that, while not normally pathogenic, might pose a particular risk to them. Such individuals would need to be discussed on a case-by-case basis with Occupational Health advice and referrals as necessary.

Certain zoonotic diseases can affect the unborn child if the mother is infected during pregnancy. Further information about the health and safety of new and expectant mothers can be found in SC66; including the need to carry out a specific risk assessment.

Zoonotic Infections Control Measures

- Always dispose of clinical waste in appropriate yellow waste stream. Take advice from safety office / supervisor on handling animals if you have any immune deficiency or suspect you are pregnant.
- Effective hand hygiene and disinfection are crucial for maintaining the strict standard of hygiene we operate within the Institute. Hands must be washed after each consultation with an animal and antiseptic gels are available across the site.
- Immunisation: If the risk assessment for the work indicates that there is a risk of exposure to diseases for which effective vaccines exist, then these should be offered to staff. Immunisation should be viewed as a useful supplement to the physical and procedural controls that should be in place, not as the sole protective measure. Various vaccines exist for zoonotic diseases, and the availability and efficacy of individual vaccines should be discussed with the Occupational Health Service before work starts.

Client Visits /Off site working

- Visits to outside clients must have full risk assessment prior to any visits. Lone working is discouraged and students must NEVER be allowed to handle animals without adequate supervision. Guidance can be found in the off-site working COP.
- A first aid box must be taken on all visits to clients and when carrying out field work.
- When visiting remote locations always carry a fully charged mobile phone and make sure that network contact is available. Inform supervisor, site owner of your visit and when you are expected to return.
- Vehicles, equipment and protective clothing must be fully disinfected following every external site visits.
Accident Reporting

All accidents and injuries should be reported to your supervisor, the safety coordinator and through the Safety Advisors’ Office webpage as soon as possible. This can be found at https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/intranet/safety/ then follow the link for accident reporting. Near miss incidents should also be reported to improve safety standards.
## HAZARD 1

**Exposure to animal allergens.** The Small Animal Teaching Hospital, The Equine Hospital, VTS, University Vet Practice, Farm Animal Practice, Farms, Post Mortem Rooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RISK</th>
<th>Low</th>
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</table>

### WHO IS AT RISK?
Clinicians, residents, students, nurses, technical/support staff, contractors, farm staff and visitors.

### CONTROLS

**The MBE Unit and Block B are not covered by this risk assessment.** A more detailed risk assessment is required please refer to [The University of Liverpool Code of Practice on Controlling Occupational Exposure to Animal Allergens](#).

Practical allergen reduction measures include:

- Protective equipment and clothing must be dedicated to animal work and not worn outside the facility. Protective clothing worn in these areas must not be removed from the building (except for laundry etc) and must not be worn in any of the areas at Leahurst designated as uncontaminated, in particular:
  1. The Main building at Leahurst (with the exception of the corridor outside the PM room and the student laboratory)
  2. The NCZR building
  3. Leahurst house
  4. Ritchie House
  5. The Library
  6. The Wellcome Building

See map below

- Protective clothing worn for handling animals outdoors must similarly not be worn in any building not designated as contaminated.

Note that the protocols set down for the control of allergens are similar to those for the control of pathogens: see the document [Leahurst: protective clothing](#).
### CONTROLS
- Wearing protective clothing that is laundered regularly.
- Ventilation to minimize the amount of allergen in the air (i.e. extraction of air and allergens to outside).
- The ventilation system (where present) should be inspected annually and properly maintained by Facilities Management to ensure maximum efficiency. A record of all inspections and repairs should be kept by Facilities Management. System failures must be reported immediately.
- Surfaces, where possible, should be impervious, continuous and without sharp corners in order to facilitate cleaning.
- Using HEPA filtered vacuum cleaners and wet cleaning instead of dry brushing.
- Disposing of clipped hair, dander, blood, urine, faeces and other body tissues as soon as possible.
- Separating facilities for washing, changing, eating and drinking away from animal handling areas.
- Special protective devices are not necessary when working with clinical animals. Staff and visitors may be provided with protective devices if appropriate and in consultation with Occupational Health. **Staff and students working with laboratory animals in designated rooms must follow The University of Liverpool Code of Practice on Controlling Occupational Exposure to Animal Allergens** and complete a COSHH assessment using the form in the appendix.
- Information given to staff and students on animal allergens during induction.
- Occupational animal allergens information is documented in IVS/Leahurst COP The COPO and this guidance is published on the IVS intranet.
- Guide dogs and other aid dogs should be allowed to accompany their owners to all parts of the Veterinary School and Leahurst Campus as necessary, unless the presence of the dog is inappropriate (e.g. clean laboratory, disturbance of other animals etc.).

### Health Surveillance
- Occupational Health will send an annual questionnaire to all staff and postgraduate students deemed to be exposed through work to animal allergen.
- Completion of this questionnaire is part of a legal obligation under the COSHH Regulations. Failure to return the questionnaire within a reasonable time could result in a recommendation that all exposure to animals should cease.
- Staff that develop clinical signs consistent with allergies should assessed by Occupational Health. Failure to co-operate may also result in a recommendation to cease exposure to animals.
- Newly appointed staff should complete a pre-employment Occupational Health questionnaire and follow up assessment where necessary
- Students should be given advice on the risks from animal allergens, practical measures to minimize the risk, encouraged to report clinical signs consistent with allergic sensitization and seek appropriate medical advice.

### FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED
- Supervisors should ensure that all persons, for whom they are responsible, have seen and understand this risk assessment.
- Periodic audits should be carried out to ensure safe working practices.
- This risk assessment will be made available to visiting and external contractor’s staff, who should be instructed by their own supervisors. Failure to work safely should be brought to the attention of the contractor or their representative.
- See also standard operating procedures for dissection rooms, post-mortem rooms, disinfection and disposal of animals and animal tissues, and transport of animals, and model rules for external staff and visitors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAZARD 2</th>
<th>Physical risks from handling animals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RISK</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO IS AT RISK?</td>
<td>Everyone at Leahurst or in the dissection room or Small Animal Practice in Liverpool; Particularly clinical staff and students, some technical/support staff, farm staff and clients to the hospitals and practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONTROLS</td>
<td>Referring practices are encouraged to highlight fractious or aggressive behavior before referral. Owners should be questioned about their animal’s temperament before it is examined. The temperament should be clearly recorded on the clinical records and verbally communicated to other staff and students that will come into contact with the animal(s).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The clinician in charge of each case should assess the likely risk before proceeding, and if necessary the opinion of senior staff should be sought.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All animals must be handled and restrained using facilities appropriate to the species, age/size and procedure. Equipment (e.g. leads, collars, bridles, halters, reins, ropes, boxes, stalls etc.) should be in good repair and fit for purpose. Unfit equipment should not be used. Standard operating procedures and guidelines must be followed and equipment should not be used by untrained or unqualified staff.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Protective clothing and/or equipment (e.g. padded gloves, helmets etc.) must be available and used if appropriate. Non-slip, enclosed footwear must be worn.</td>
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<td>Animals in proximity to one another should be controlled and must not have direct physical contact.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff and students should not handle animals in restricted areas and should always have an ‘escape route’ available.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Particular care should be taken with intact stallions and bulls, females with suckling young and animals recovering from anesthesia. Remember that animals in unfamiliar surroundings and that are sick or in pain may behave unpredictably and out of character.</td>
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<td>Heavy animals should be lifted following The University of Liverpool Guidelines for Manual Lifting. Guidelines for the use of hoists, trolleys etc. must also be followed.</td>
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<td>Junior staff and students must receive instruction and appropriate supervision in handling techniques and risk management.</td>
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<td>First aid boxes should be maintained for treatment of minor injuries by staff trained in first aid (although it is accepted that qualified veterinary surgeons and nurses are competent to administer basic first aid). Medical advice should be sought for more serious injuries.</td>
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</table>
**Dogs, cats and small mammals:**

Any dog or cat that cannot be restrained effectively by the owner or staff to place a muzzle on should not be examined. Oral sedatives may be administered in food to allow handling but the owners should accept that giving sedatives carries some risk.

Dogs or cats that cannot be safely restrained by staff to place a muzzle on should not be admitted as in-patients. In exceptional cases dogs admitted under sedation as above should be placed in a secure kennel or run and the owner allowed to retrieve them under supervision of the primary clinician or qualified nurse.

Aggressive in-patients in the SATH and UVP should be identified by a red identification collar and a care may bite sign on the kennel.

A non-slip lead can be left on at the discretion of the primary clinician to aid handling. Dog catchers should only be used by suitably qualified staff as a last resort.

Staff and students should not work with aggressive animals on their own and never be locked into a walk-in kennel with any dog.

A muzzle should be used to carry out procedures when there is any doubt over a dog’s temperament. Muzzles should never be left on unattended dogs.

Staff and students should be familiar with the SATH Clinical Handbook.

**Birds** – particular care needs to be taken with large birds and birds of prey, which should only be handled under the supervision of those with experience of handling that species.

**Horses:**

Staff and students should not examine or carry out any procedures with horses alone.

Horses with a suspect temperament should be clearly identified by a label on the box door.

Horses should be restrained by the use of a head collar or bridle (if suitable) at all times.

A head collar may be left on fractious animals at the discretion of the senior clinician to facilitate handling.

Animals should not be admitted if staff cannot place a head collar and/or bridle safely. These animals may be examined and/or treated in the owner’s presence if the owner can place a head collar and/or bridle. They may be sedated and/or anaesthetized for further procedures at the discretion of the senior clinician in charge of the case and with the owner’s consent. Such animals may be allowed to recover in a secure area and the owner allowed to retrieve them under supervision of the primary clinician or qualified nurse.

The Equine Hospital Clinical Rotations Handbook also contains information on horse handling.

BEVA guidance on Managing Risks From Working with Horses provides additional guidance on risk assessments and control measures https://www.beva.org.uk/.
Wildlife and exotic species should only be handled by or under the direct supervision of suitably experienced and qualified staff.

**Farm animals (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs)**
Staff and students should not usually handle, examine or carry out any procedures with farm animals alone. Exceptions might be young animals of a size and number that doesn’t present a risk.

Staff and students should be familiar with the relevant sections of the HSE publications [Farmwise](#) and [Housing and Handling Cattle](#).

**Off Site**
Horses and farm animals may be seen, examined and/or procedures carried out at external premises. Such premises should have appropriate guidelines for handling animals and a member of staff or owner should be present during the visit. It is the responsibility of the senior university staff member present to assess the situation and proceed accordingly. Staff should not continue if, in their opinion, it is not safe to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>• This risk assessment will be made available to visiting and external contractor’s staff, who should be instructed by their own supervisors. Failures to work safely should be brought to the attention of the contractor or their representative.</td>
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<td>• Farmers/horse owners are responsible for their own actions, and those of their staff, whilst working on their own premises. Veterinary staff may, however, be held responsible if someone is injured by an animal under their care and supervision. Safe working practices should therefore be enforced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAZARD 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>RISK</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO IS AT RISK?</td>
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| CONTROLS | • A high standard of hygiene is expected from all staff and students.  
• Medical advice should be sought as soon as possible in any suspected cases of zoonotic infection. However, it is accepted that trivial problems such as ectoparasites and dermatophytosis may be treated with over-the-counter medications.  
• Referring practices/farms etc. are encouraged to identify cases that potentially have communicable diseases as early possible.  
• Clean protective coats, overalls, appropriate uniforms and footwear to be worn at all times. Soiled garments should be changed and/or cleaned as soon as possible.  
• Staff and students must use antibacterial hand washes after seeing each patient.  
• Wounds and skin lesions must be covered with a waterproof dressing.  
• Full barrier nursing may be instituted at the discretion of the primary clinician in suspect cases and in all cases where a communicable disease is confirmed. Barrier nursing includes the use of full protective gowns, impervious gloves, eye protection and face masks (FFP3 standard) if aerosols are a hazard. Protective clothing and equipment should disposed of and not worn elsewhere in the hospital.  
• Kennels, wards, stalls and other areas of the SATH/PLEH, soiled bedding and utensils should be cleaned and disinfected daily.  
• Urine, faeces, other bodily fluids and clinical waste should be disposed in yellow bags as soon as possible. Used sharps must be placed in solid plastic sharps containers (e.g. ‘cin-bin’ etc.) immediately. Contaminated surfaces should be cleaned as soon as possible and between patients with an appropriate disinfectant.  
• Eating and drinking must not take place where animals are kept or handled.  
• Special care must be taken when handling potentially pathogenic material in post-mortem and dissection rooms. Protective coats or overalls, footwear, gloves and, where appropriate, masks and eye protection should be worn. Special containment facilities may be necessary if organisms requiring containment level 2 or more are suspected. |
| FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED | • Supervisors should ensure that all persons, for whom they are responsible, have seen and understand this risk assessment.  
• Periodic audits should be carried out to ensure safe working.  
• Additional supervision and /or training may be necessary. For some activities supervision is mandatory for students.  
• This risk assessment will be made available to visiting and external contractor’s staff, who should be instructed by their own supervisors. Failure to work safely should be brought to the attention of the contractor or their representative. Non-clinical staff/students should not normally be exposed to infectious material.  
• Anyone at particular risk of zoonotic infection must contact Occupational Health.  
• Advice and appropriate working guidelines should be established for each case.  
• See also standard operating procedures for dissection rooms, post mortem rooms, disinfection and disposal of animals and animal tissues, and transport of animals, and model rules for external staff and visitors. |